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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether 81 sixth grade students from various socioeconomic and racial backgrounds perceived any disadvantages in being taught by a team of teachers rather than by a single teacher in a self-contained classroom. Critics of team teaching assert that a self-contained classroom provides more stability, security, structure, and individualized instruction than does team teaching. Proponents of team teaching argue that the practice improves faculty morale and allows better integration of subjects than does teaching in a self-contained classroom. Students who were being taught by a team of teachers completed a survey measuring the amount of comfort they felt when being taught by a team rather than in a self-contained classroom. Students also wrote opinion papers explaining which teaching model they preferred and why. The results indicated that while some students experienced problems with team teaching, most preferred to be taught by a team rather than one teacher, for two overriding reasons: because it gave them more opportunity to interact with others and because it reduced boredom. It is recommended that schools consider student input when planning teaching practices. Three appendixes include a description of the teaching teams in the study, a copy of the students' survey, and a tabulation of survey results. Contains 17 references. (MDM)

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Sixth Grade Students' Opinions and Perceptions of Team Teaching: Addressing the Criticisms

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Abstract

This study was conducted with 81 sixth grade students in central Virginia to determine if they perceived what critics claim are disadvantages of being taught by a team of teachers rather than by a single teacher in a self-contained classroom. The students completed surveys and wrote opinion papers that explained which organizational model they preferred and why. The results from the surveys as well as the students' papers confirmed the observation that students do experience some of the difficulties of team teaching to which critics point. They also showed that despite these problems, most students prefer to be taught by a team. Their reasons for this preference gave some interesting insight into the minds and priorities of preadolescents that could be extremely helpful to those planning middle schools.

Sixth Grade Students' Opinions and Perceptions of Team Teaching: Addressing the Criticisms

Despite the popularity of team teaching in the middle school that George and Oldaker (1985) and Lounsbury and Johnston (1988) cite, there are criticisms of teaming from proponents of the traditional, self-contained, elementary classroom where students stay with the same teacher for most of the day. These critics claim that the single teacher in a self-contained classroom should not be replaced with a team of teachers. Amid a small and conflicting amount of research, the question still remains: is replacing the single teacher with a team of teachers helpful or harmful to students?

Often criticisms arise simply because people are not using common definitions for self-contained and team teaching; in order to have any useful discussion, it is important to define the terms. For my purposes, self-contained classrooms refer to those classrooms most commonly seen in elementary schools where the students remain with the same teacher for the majority of the day. They are distinguished from departmentalized classes, most frequently seen in junior high and high schools, where there is only one teacher in each class, but students change teachers throughout the day. Different from either of these models is team teaching, which is:

> a way of organizing faculty so that a group of teachers share: (1) the responsibility for planning, teaching and evaluating the curriculum and instruction in more than

one academic area; (2) the same group of students; (3) the same schedule; and (4) the same area of the building. (Alexander and George (1981), p. 115).

There are many widely acclaimed advantages of team teaching for both students and teachers. For teachers who have long complained that teaching is one of the most isolated professions, teaming offers a solution. Arhar, Johnston, and Markle (1988) relate that for teachers, "the teams produced a sense of community and shared commitment which diminished teacher isolation and uncertainty about effectiveness" (p. 24). This kind of collaboration leads to higher job satisfaction, faculty morale, and teacher empowerment than what is normally accessible to teachers in more isolated environments.

Whitelaw (1988) also relates another advantage for teachers who have previously worked as generalists in a self-contained classroom. Team teaching allows them to teach to their strengths or, at least, concentrate on a smaller number of subjects so that the quality of their instruction is higher. Of course, the drawback to this is that teachers who change from self-contained classrooms to specialized classes on a team, must spend many hours with other teachers working to integrate their lessons. Moving from a self-contained classroom to a team makes integrating subjects more difficult and time consuming.

However, for teachers who change from a departmentalized setting, teaming allows them to integrate subject matter much more easily. In a departmentalized school, teachers do not share a common group of students or planning time, so effective integration is virtually impossible and rarely, if ever, attempted. Nickle, Flynt, Poynter,

and Rees (1990) report that integration of subjects is important, because it makes instruction more meaningful and helps students retain knowledge better.

The research on academic improvement that might support this claim is mixed, however. Cotton's (1982) review of 13 studies and three large-scale reviews led her to conclude that there is no difference between the two models as far as academic achievement is concerned. However, Arhar et. al. (1989) cite recent studies, demonstrating that students in teaming situations have better achievement scores than students in departmentalized settings. The research on affective improvement of team-taught students much more consistently favors teaming. Many of the studies that Arhar et. al. (1989) cite explain that these improved attitudes towards school may be the cause of the marked decrease in discipline problems of schools that switch from a departmentalized approach to a team taught one.

The most frequently mentioned student-centered advantage of teams is that they allow students to become part of a small unit within the school. Schmidt and Kane (1984) explain that because teams make a school smaller, they also make it more personal and individualized for students. MacIver (1990) also asserts that teams foster a sense of stability and coherent caring that improve students' attitudes about school.

These smaller units also benefit students because parents can meet more easily with their children's teachers. As Schmidt and Kane (1984) report, with teaming "it is now even possible, during the school day, for parents to meet with a youngster's four or five academic teachers and receive a full, rounded evaluation of academic progress" (p. 35). This is clearly impossible in departmentalized junior high schools and may explain,

at least in part, why McKenna (1989) found that there is more parental involvement in schools that team than there is in more traditional schools.

It is important to note, however, that most of the research on student improvement, including the studies cited here, compare departmentalization with teaming. Additionally, the previously mentioned advantages for students exclusively compare the environment of a departmentalized junior high school to that of a team taught middle school. The only student-centered advantage of team teaching over the self-contained classroom that proponents mention is that teaming "provides more opportunities for each child to find friends and soulmates, and give[s] children more chances to develop a satisfying relationship with a teacher" (Anderson, 1989, p. 46). Otherwise, the advantages for students exclusively relate to those students who change from departmentalization to team teaching.

Since team teaching proponents only cite one advantage that specifically compares team teaching to the self-contained classroom, several educators claim that a self-contained classroom is more beneficial to students than team teaching. Smith (1985) and Elkind (1988) feel that in team teaching, there is an overemphasis on subject matter compared to the needs of the whole child, and Culyer (1984) advocates keeping self-contained classrooms at least through the eighth grade. In light of the fact that nearly all of the benefits of team teaching for students do not compare teaming to self-contained classrooms, their criticisms deserve to be heard.

The critics' argument is that team teaching is not in the best interest of the child. Smith (1985) contends that grade school children need the stability and security that only

a single teacher can provide. Culyer (1984) also argues that because of the increasing fragmentation of our society, it is imperative that schools and teachers serve *in loco parentis* and maintains that this is best accomplished when a child sees the same teacher all day. Whitelaw (1988) also relates a fifth grade teacher's concern that "her students are emotionally too young to adjust to a number of different teachers" (p. 95).

Related to this concern that students feel a loss of stability and security on a team, is the fear that team teachers have too many students to sufficiently care for each of them as individuals. Even Lounsbury (1990), a proponent of team teaching, admits:

> It is impossible to deny the reality that a teacher who spends 50 minutes daily with 120 different youngsters is not in nearly as good a position to know them and influence them, academically and behaviorally, as is a teacher who spends 100 minutes daily with 60 different youngsters or one who spends 150 minutes a day with only 30 youngsters. (p. 41).

Culyer (1984), Smith (1985), Elkind (1988), and teachers whom Whitelaw (1988) quotes, all insist that the very nature of team teaching requires that instruction become less individualized than it is in a self-contained classroom.

Arhar et. al. (1989) cite two studies, McPartland (1987) and McPartland, Coldiron and Braddock (1987) that in part support these criticisms. McPartland found that teachers with the responsibility for large numbers of students will tend to focus on the subject matter rather than on the students, thus negatively affecting student performance. The studies, however, compare sixth graders in self-contained classrooms to those in departmentalized settings, not self-contained classrooms to team teaching. In fact, there

seems to be no research that addresses these concerns by studying the effects of changing a self-contained classroom to a team taught situation.

Finally, critics note that the self-contained environment is especially appropriate for hyperactive, insecure, and slow-learning children. Culyer (1984) observes:

> As groups, these children tend to function best with one teacher who knows them well, understands their needs, and can structure an environment which provides consistency, continuity, security, and success. Unfortunately, various teachers tend to do things in different ways. The constant requirements that pupils shift from one set of expectations, rules, and procedures to another can be most confusing to some youngsters. (p. 419).

The critics feel that the troubles that regular students experience are only compounded for mainstreamed special education students.

While there is no research that refutes or verifies these criticisms of teaming, some educators have intuitively sensed that some of these claims might be valid. In its document, *Framework for Education in the Middle School Grades in Virginia* (1989), the Virginia Department of Education sets forth a philosophy of middle school education that implicitly accepts some of the previously mentioned criticisms. While it refutes the idea that the self-contained model is best for sixth graders and recommend team teaching, it does assume that students have difficulty adjusting to several teachers:

> The middle school years should be a time of smooth transition from the elementary school to the high school. Students in the middle school grades

> should move through a broadening continuum of instruction and structure that takes them from the self-contained elementary classroom to the six-or-seven period day which is typically the high school experience. (p. 16).

It recommends that sixth graders have "a reception into an environment not greatly different from the elementary school. For example, a sixth-grade student might best be placed with a team of only two or three teachers for core subjects" (p. 16). Because it stresses that "a smooth transition to high school is necessary," it recommends that each subsequent grade add one more teacher to its teams (p. 16).

Even these recommendations, however, are based on an intuitive sense of how students feel, not on research. It is surprising that very little research has examined the effects of team teaching on students by asking the students themselves. Some research does include student surveys as a small part of a larger whole, but few studies have given serious weight to students' perceptions by solely examining their opinions. Yet Arhar et. al. (1989), as well as numerous others, emphasize the link between students' attitudes towards school and school effectiveness. McKenna (1989) quotes Bill Honig, California's superintendent for public instruction, who observes, "For many students, the middle grades represent the last chance to develop a sense of academic purpose and personal commitment to educational goals" (p. 17). Certainly students' attitudes towards school and their opinions of it play a critical role in their success.

Few educators challenge the claim that team teaching benefits teachers, and for the most part, there is a consensus that team teaching is much better for students than departmentalization. There is less evidence, however, that team teaching is better than

the self-contained classroom, and herein lies the problem. The purpose of this study is to address the criticism that team teaching is not beneficial to students and to examine if replacing the single teacher with a team of teachers causes students to feel a loss of comfort in the classroom. This study is unique because it focuses solely on the opinions and perceptions of students and because it compares team teaching to the traditional elementary school where students are taught by the same teacher for the majority of the day. In my own teaching experience, I have observed that some students do experience the difficulties that the critics of teaming cite, but I have also noted that those same students seem to enjoy being on a team. In light of these apparently conflicting observations and in an attempt to remain neutral with regard to both sides of the issue, I do not propose a hypothesis, but rather pose the following questions: 1) Do children in a team teaching situation feel a loss of stability and security, and if so, to what extent? 2) Do team taught children lose their sense of individuality and become mere members of a group? 3) Do mainstreamed hyperactive or slow-learning children have an even more difficult time in a team teaching situation than their peers?

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 81 sixth graders from three different teams at an upper elementary school in a city in central Virginia. Students attending this school consist of all the fifth and sixth graders living in this city, and therefore represent a broad spectrum of socio-economic settings and racial backgrounds. Students at this school

come from upper-middle class and middle class neighborhoods as well as city supported housing projects. Most student are bussed to the school.

This study included students from language arts classes in all three sixth grade teams. Forty-two of the students were from team "A," 25 were from team "B," and 14 from team "C." This school bases placement of students in language arts and math classes on ability level. In order to get a diverse sample of students, two of the classes surveyed were low to average language arts classes with a combined total of 30 students. The other two language arts classes surveyed were average to high groups with a combined total of 51 students. Three of the participants were mainstreamed Learning Disabled students, who met with a resource teacher daily. An additional four students were in the Intervention program, which pulls students out of a class for 45 minutes each day to give additional instruction in language arts or math to students who are in danger of failing the passport to literacy test. Twenty-one of the students were considered gifted due to their participation in the city's gifted and talented program. For more information on these teams, see Appendix A.

Instrument

The survey contained questions that were designed to measure the level of comfort students feel on a team compared to that of a self-contained classroom. (See Appendix B for the complete survey.) Question one asked the students to report how many teachers they had in one day. While taking the survey, students were told to count the different teachers they see during the week. This allowed them to count the two enriching arts teachers they see on alternate days. They did not count teacher aids,

student teachers, tutors, or any other school staff. Question two was designed to obtain their initial opinion of being taught by a team before they were influenced by the issues raised in the remainder of the survey. Questions three through 13 were designed to determine the degree to which students experienced confusion, difficulty, or a loss of stability from being on a team. They addressed the classroom rules and routines, homework, and changing classes. Questions 14 through 18 were designed to determine if students felt a loss of security and individuality from being on a team. They investigated teachers' availability to give extra help, and students' relationship with and trust of their teachers. Question 19 allowed the students to list advantages and disadvantages associated with team teaching settings and self-contained classrooms that the previous questions in the survey had not addressed.

After completing the surveys, the students then used question 19 as their brainstorming material to further articulate their opinions of teaming versus self-contained classrooms in an opinion paper. The paper was used to determine not only their preference but also the degree to which they were comfortable with teams. The assumption was that students who expressed a preference of self-contained classrooms over teams were uncomfortable or dissatisfied with being on a team.

Procedure

Before the students began to fill out the surveys, I explained to the students that their responses would be kept anonymous and urged the students to be completely honest in their responses. I read through each question with the students, clarifying

anything that was necessary. After students had completed the survey, I then explained the writing assignment.

The students worked on their papers for three consecutive days, 40 minutes each day, using the process approach to writing. All of the students were familiar with this method. Students wrote their rough drafts in class. The next day I divided the students into revision groups. I asked the students to listen to their peers' papers and answer the following questions: Did the author... 1) tell how many teachers he/she wants? 2) give at least 3 reasons why that system is good? 3) explain why the other system is not as good? 4) give details to support the reasons so that you can understand them? While discussing their papers in terms of these questions, the students made notes on how they would like to revise their work. Then they wrote their second draft, attached it to their original, and turned it in. The following day, students circulated their papers to other students who looked for mechanical errors and made editing marks on the papers. After two or three others had edited their papers, the students wrote their final copies of the paper and turned it in along with their original drafts.

Results and Discussion

The results from the surveys as well as the students' opinion papers confirmed my initial observations that students do experience some of the difficulties of team teaching to which critics point. They also showed that despite these problems, most students preferred to be taught by a team. Their reasons for this preference gave some interesting insight into the minds and priorities of preadolescents.

Table 1 shows the results from the 80 students who responded to the question how many teachers do you have each day.

Table 1 Students' report of how many teachers they have.

Number of Teachers	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Percent of Students	4%	14%	26%	29%	18%	9%	1%

The fact that 87% of the students reported that they had between six and nine teachers was astounding, especially considering Virginia's recommendation that sixth grade students should have only two or three teachers on a team. While an inspection of these students' schedules may not actually corroborate these numbers, the importance of this statistic lay in the children's perceptions. It was significant that they sensed they had this many teachers and were able to count such a high number of teachers to whom they were responsible during any given week.

Two other important results that were not revealed by these statistics came from the students' verbal responses to these questions. They had a great deal of difficulty counting how many teachers they had. Quite unexpectedly this question took at least five minutes for the class to complete and in the case of some lower-ability students, even more time. It was disturbing to learn that these children had so many teachers that they could not easily identify them all.

It was also disconcerting to discover how many of them had difficulty recalling the last time they had one teacher for the majority of the day. Many said they had been

taught by two or more teachers since second grade. This practice does not seem to be at all in accordance with the Virginia Department of Education's recommendation that team teaching begin in sixth grade with two to three teachers. Obviously many students undergo teaming or simply changing classes long before middle school.

Yet the results did not indicate that children experienced an overwhelming loss of stability and security from being placed in a team teaching situation. They did feel some confusion and difficulty but to varying degrees. Of the 81 students surveyed only 21% said the teachers' rules were different from class to class.[1] This may be due to the fact that each team agreed on common rules and attempted to apply them consistently. However, some students noted that having several teachers allowed them to take advantage of rules. One student wrote in his opinion paper, "I like [a team] because . . . you can go to the bathroom 14 times a day if you go [two] times a class."

Seventy-one percent did notice that class routines such as ways of keeping a notebook, amounts of and rules for turning in homework, and the level of difficulty of tests varied from teacher to teacher. Included in this figure was the students' response to the question if getting homework assignments from several different teachers was a problem. While a large number of students noticed differences among teachers' procedures, a lesser 41% said that getting and completing assignments from different teachers was a problem. However, of all the class routines, homework was the one that students commented on most in their opinion papers. Frequently, students felt that

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[1]The average margin of error for this population is ±4%.

having more teachers resulted in more homework. One student who wanted to decrease the size of the team wrote, "With three teachers you wouldn't get as much homework as you would with seven and it would be much easier to remember."

Critics of team teaching also claim that changing classes causes extreme difficulty for students. However in responding to questions concerning this issue, only 17% said they experienced difficulty changing classes. From the survey results, the largest problem students had is that they sometimes brought the wrong books to class. One student reflected on that problem in his paper, "[With one teacher] you don't have to move at all and you won't forget your supplies. . . . Lockers to me are just jungles for you to lose books and paper." While only 9% of the students reported in the survey that they were often late to class, several expressed anxiety about tardiness in their papers. One student said that in moving from class to class she was "afraid of getting there late." Another explained the problem further: "Sometimes people forget which class to go to next and get to that class late, especially after a long vacation. While people are switching classes they bump into each other and that causes arguments." Like this student, several others also expressed worry about overcrowded hallways that can lead to fights. One student wrote, "I want to be taught by one teacher, so . . . we don't have to go into the hall every 30 min. to change classes. I don't wan't people to get into fights and other people push every time we change class" (*sic*).

In addition to the criticisms about the effects of teaming on typical students, critics also assert that lower-ability level students experience these problems to a greater degree than their peers. The assumption is that these students have more problems, less

ability to cope with them, and fewer organizational skills than more able students, and therefore they especially need the security of a self-contained classroom. In order to examine this concern, the results from seven students who were either Learning Disabled or received intervention instruction for language arts or math were compared with the whole group of students as well as 21 extremely advanced students, those identified as gifted by their participation in Quest.[2]

It was interesting that both of these samples of students sensed that the rules in their classes were different more so than the total group did, although it was unclear why their perceptions differed. Figure 1 demonstrates that 90% of Quest and 57% of LD/Intervention students reported that classroom rules were different among teachers. On the other hand, both groups' responses to the questions about class routines were not significantly different from each other's or the total population's. Forty-three percent of the LD/Intervention students did say that they experienced problems getting homework assignments from different teachers, while only 19% of the Quest students reported

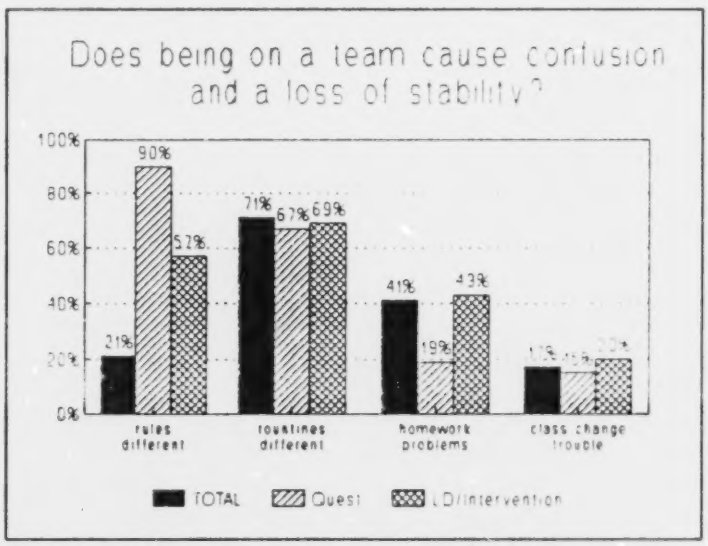

Figure 1 Students' responses to survey questions 3-13.

[2]Because of the smaller populations in these figures, the average margin of error for LD/Intervention and Quest is ±18% and 7% respectively.

problems. This result, however, revealed more about gifted students' greater ability to organize and cope than it did the LD/Intervention students' lack of ability, since the lower-level students' answers were extremely similar to those of the total population.

Finally, there was not a significant difference between the LD/Intervention and Quest students in their response to the questions concerning difficulty changing classes. Only 20% of the lower-level students and 15% of the gifted students reported that they experienced difficulty. This response was also similar to the 17% of the total population who said they had troubles.

Certainly some students observe differences among classes and teachers, especially in the area of class routines, but unlike the critics would have people believe, an large number of students do not express an overwhelming sense of confusion, difficulty, or loss of stability from being taught by a team. Except in a few instances, there was not a significant difference among low-ability students, the total population, and gifted students either. These findings supported the idea that the criticisms of team teaching are primarily based on intuition and not supportable by research on students' own perceptions.

Another issue that concerns critics is that children in a team teaching situation lose their sense of individuality and become mere members of a group. Their claim is based on three assumptions: team teachers do not have the time and flexible schedule to give extra help to students who need it, team teachers do not know their students as well as self-contained teachers do, and as a result students are not as comfortable going to team teachers for help with personal problems.

With respect to these criticisms, the results from the students' survey responses were mixed. Like the other criticisms, they did not completely support the claims, nor did they entirely refute them. Figure 2 shows that 64% of students felt that they received more help from their team teachers, and an additional 16% felt that they received the same amount of help as they did from self-contained teachers. And what about those low-ability students who need the most help? Forty-three percent of them responded that they got more help from their team teachers compared to when they had one teacher, and an additional 14% said they got the same amount of help. Some students explained that having several teachers gave them the opportunity to seek out help with school work from several different sources. One student wrote, "I would rather be taught by a team because, on a team you have more than one teacher to help you with your work or problems."

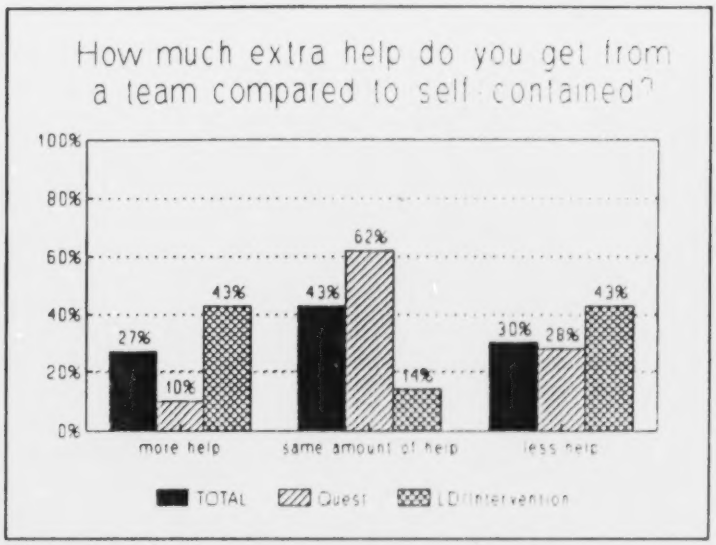

Figure 2 Students' responses to survey question 15.

These findings seemed to indicate that this criticism of teaming is not valid. However, part of that criticism results from the concern that the team teaching schedule is not as flexible as the self-contained one. Although it does not have to be the case, many team teachers are ruled by the bell. "What's good about one teacher?" asked one

student in her paper. "They wouldn't have to stop in the middle of class because it is time to go." Another student explained that she would like to have one teacher because, "I could ask her questions in another class about the class before." While many students felt that they received as much or more help from their team teachers, it may not be because the teachers were able to give extra help during class. At the school in this study, some teams provided an optional study hall during recess and all students were permitted use the after-school busses so that they could receive help from teachers after school.

Only 43% of LD/Intervention students reported that they got less help from their team teachers, but it must also be noted that the percent of LD/Intervention students who felt that they got less help was higher than either the Quest students or the total population. This result correlated with the students' response to a similar question. As Figure 3 demonstrates, when asked if their teachers have time to give them extra help, 85% of the students said yes. Again, there was a significant difference in the response from the LD/Intervention students. Only 57% of those students responded that their teachers had time to give them extra

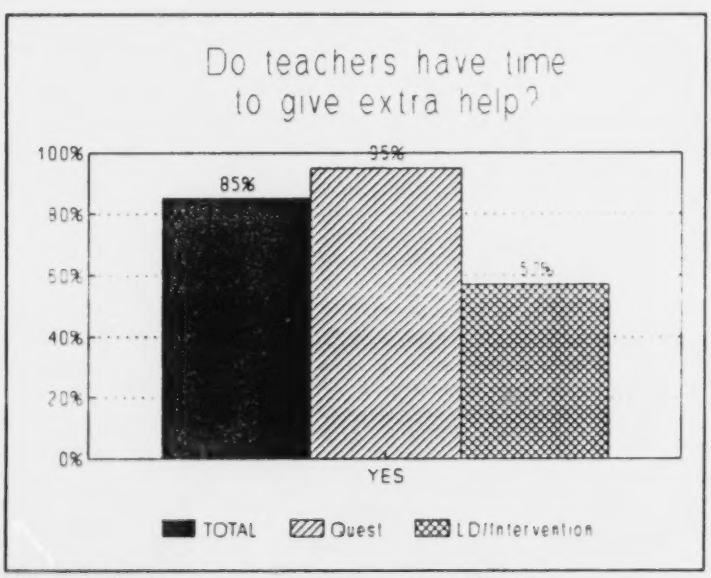

Figure 3 Students' responses to survey question 14.

help. Yet 57% of those same students said that their team teachers gave them the same amount or even more help than their previous self-contained teachers did. Perhaps the best explanation for this apparent contradiction in their responses is that these very needy children rarely feel like they get enough help from their teachers. Neither a self-contained classroom nor a team teaching situation will completely eradicate their needy feelings. However, according to the students, a team of teachers does a better job in this area than just one teacher.

This response by the LD/Intervention students may have reflected two realities about the differences between a self-contained classroom and a team. Low-ability students often have different styles of learning and therefore need alternative models of instruction. While it is possible for one person to offer many different kinds of instruction in order to match all of the students' learning styles, it is also difficult. There is a greater likelihood that students will receive at least a portion of the day's instruction in a way that best suits them individually if they are taught by a variety of teachers.

Additionally, while one teacher can spend part of her day looking out for the especially needy students in the class, she will also feel an obligation to the other students. She may consciously limit the time she spends meeting these students' needs simply out of a desire not to neglect the other students. On the other hand, if special needs children are taught by a team of teachers, they will receive extra attention and help during each instructional block. This could add up to more time than a self-contained teacher may allow herself to give. Furthermore, team teachers also consult each other regularly about these students, compare notes, and offer suggestions on how

to help them. In this way, the so often cited advantage that teaming alleviates the isolation of teaching is now clearly an advantage for low-ability students as well as their teachers.

This extra attention for low-achieving students also seemed to play a role in their response to the question concerning how well their teachers know them. As Figure 4 indicates, 43% of the LD/Intervention students felt that their teachers knew them better than a previous self-contained teacher did. This was a much larger number than the 14% of the total population that felt their team teachers knew them better. The norm of the population was not getting ignored, however, since an additional 57% felt their teachers knew them as well as a self-contained teacher. It is important to note that another 43% of the LD/Intervention students also said that their team teachers knew them as well as a self-contained teacher. Only a very small amount of LD/Intervention students felt that their teachers did not know them very well. One student noted that the reason team teachers knew their students better is because they benefitted from several different perspectives when trying to understand their students. He wrote, "My school

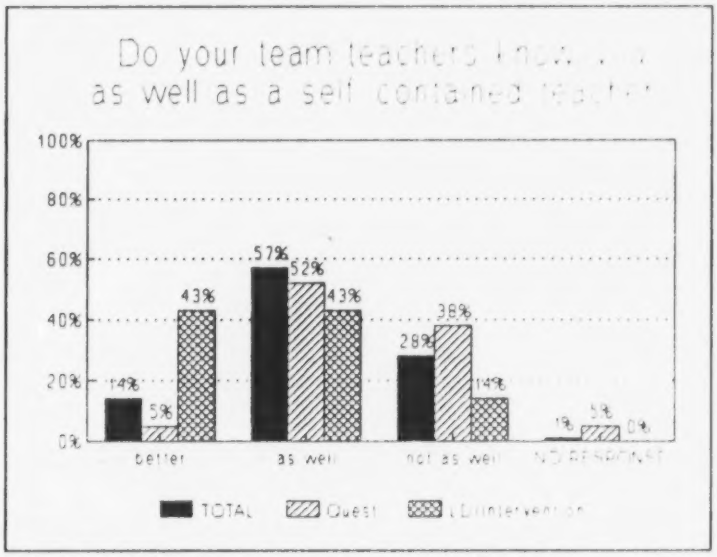

Figure 4 Students' responses to survey question 16.

would be separated into teams. This is how it would be because on teams the teachers would know you better, because they could tell each other how you act in their class."

Other students mentioned that being on a team provided them a greater opportunity to find a teacher with whom they could connect. This is an advantage that proponents of teaming also cite. One student explained, "If you did not like a teache[r] there would be different teachers that you do like." Another related, "On a team you have more teachers, so if you have a problem you have many choices of people to talk to."

Most students, especially those with special needs, felt that their teachers took an interest in them and knew who they were as individuals, despite the increased numbers of a team. There were some students who did not feel that way, however, and their opinions should not be ignored. One student wrote, "I'll pick one teacher because you get to know her or him better than when you [are] changeing classes every thirthy minutes" (*sic*). Another wrote, "When you are with only one teacher . . . you get to know the teacher better because you are with her/him the whole day. Lastly the teacher is not busy grading 110 tests so you can receive [*sic*] more help from him/her."

The critics' final objection to teaming is that because team teachers do not know their students as well as self-contained teachers do, students do not feel comfortable going to them for help with personal problems. This is an especially crucial concern for middle school students who experience a dramatic increase of personal problems during the onset of adolescence and are placed in teaming situations more than other groups of students. However, the results from the students' survey responses showed that being put

on a team changed only a small number of students' willingness to go to a teacher for help with a personal problem.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, only 21% of the total population of students felt comfortable only going to a self-contained teacher for help with a personal problem. The results for Quest and LD/Intervention students were even smaller, with none of the LD/Intervention students exclusively preferring self-contained teachers in this matter. Additionally, 30% of the students reported that they would go to both a team teacher and a self-contained teacher, and another 10% of the students said that they only would go to a team teacher for help. A slightly higher number of LD/Intervention students exclusively preferred a team teacher for help with a personal problem.

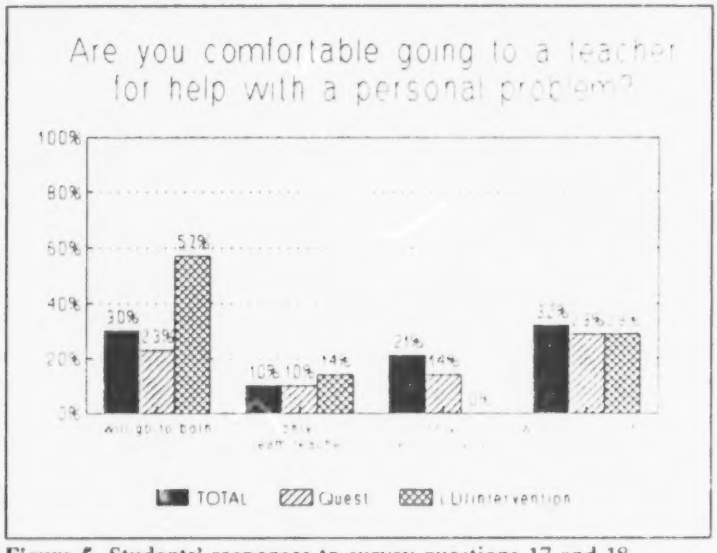

Figure 5 Students' responses to survey questions 17 and 18.

Some might remark that it is disconcerting that being placed on a team eliminated 21% of the population's willingness to go to a teacher for help, and that this phenomenon validated one criticism of teaming. While the criticism may be legitimate in some ways, it was even more troubling that a larger 32% of students felt that they could not go to a teacher for assistance in either setting. This figure probably did not indicate, either, that these students just did not have problems, because six of the 81

students surveyed, 7%, declined to answer these questions. Some even stated that they had never really had any personal problems and would not know if they would go to a teacher for help or not.

Certainly the results of this study did not indicate that students' experience with teaming is trouble-free. In addition to the discomfort some students reported that they would feel going to a team teacher for help with a personal problem, a large number of students noted that class routines varied from teacher to teacher. Almost half of the students said they experienced problems getting homework assignments from teachers, and 56% of students said they sometimes brought the wrong books to class. Many students also expressed anxiety over changing classes because they might be late or because of the crowded hallways that sometimes lead to fights. Finally, 28% of students felt that their teachers did not know them as well as previous self-contained teachers. For these students being placed on a team did cause at least some degree of difficulty.

Nevertheless, an overwhelming number of students preferred teaming. Figure 6 shows that 83% of students said they liked changing classes and having different teachers better than being in the same class all day. There was a great difference, however, between the total population and the LD/Intervention students. Only 53% of the low-ability students said they liked changing classes. While in most cases, similar proportions of students observed and experienced many of the difficulties that critics of teaming cite, the degree to which these problems negatively affected students was quite different for the different groups. Quest students seemed especially adept at dealing with the more disruptive or confusing aspects of teaming, as 90% reported that they enjoyed changing

classes. Most average students also seemed to be able to cope with the difficulties associated with teaming. However, it was clear that less LD/Intervention students had the resources to cope effectively with teams. Although 57% was still a high number, it was low compared to the other students, and this result in part confirmed the criticism that teaming is more difficult for low-ability students.

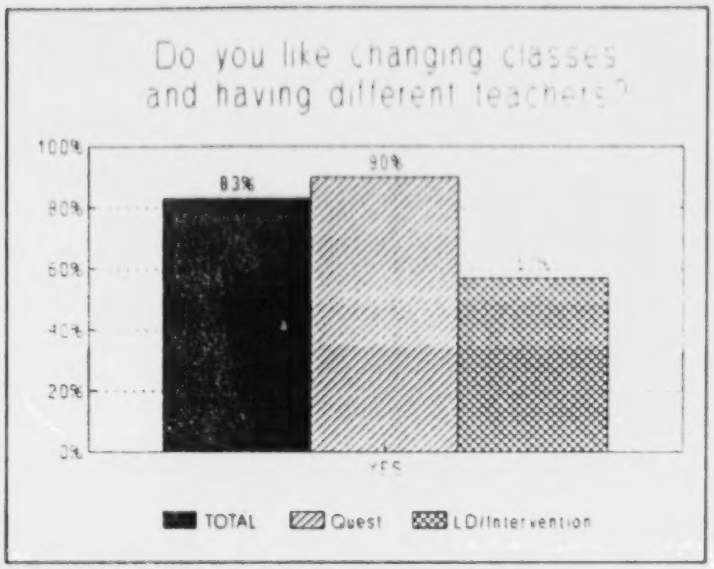

Figure 6 Students' responses to survey question 2.

Some of the students' reasons for their preference were revealed in their opinion papers. In them, the 78 students who completed the assignment expressed which organizational model they prefered and gave reasons why. They also described some of the negative aspects of the model they did not choose. The original question about whether students enjoy changing classes measured their initial response to teaming, because it came at the beginning of the survey. Yet, even after students had been given the opportunity to think about some of the issues and difficulties related to teaming through the rest of the survey questions, only 15% of the 74 students who clearly stated a choice in their papers changed their minds from their original response in the survey.

This demonstrated that these students were consistent in their thinking as well as decided in their opinions.

While the students enjoyed having several teachers, most expressed a desire to have fewer teachers. Figure 7 shows that of the 49 students who indicated an exact number of teachers that they would like to have, 73.4% gave a number that was smaller than the number of teachers they reported that they currently had. Only 16.3% said they would like to be taught by the same number of teachers, and a smaller 10% gave a larger number than the number of teachers they reported that they currently had.

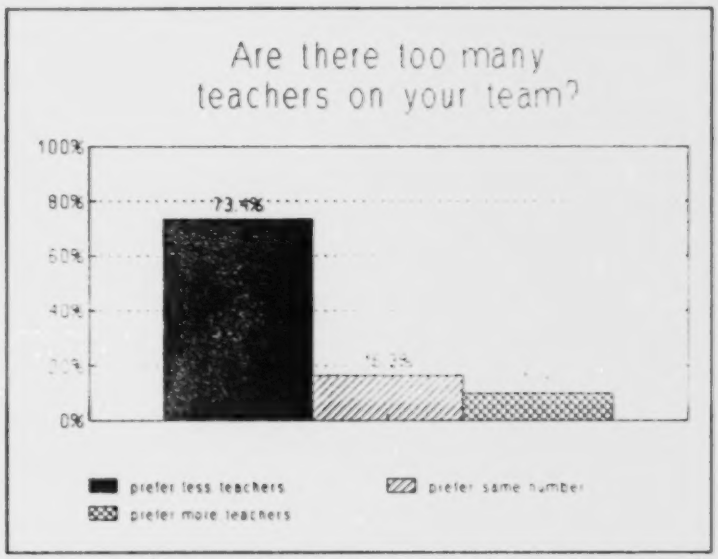

Figure 7 Students' preferences compared to the actual number of teachers they report having.

The median number of teachers students said they would like to be taught by was four and the mean was 4.6. This figure may have been slightly inaccurate, however, for two reasons. Some students were unclear about what they meant when they indicated a specific number of teachers. For example, some indicated that the wanted two to three teachers on their team, implying they wanted additional teachers for enriching arts. Other students gave a total number of teachers, including enriching arts, and others did not specify. While this phenomenon may have balanced itself out, another factor may

have caused the average to be low. Twenty-nine students who said they preferred teams did not give an exact number, so those students' preferences were not figured into either average. On the other hand, the preferences of all 16 students who said they wanted to be taught by one teacher were included in the average. If only the preferences of the students who chose to be taught by a team were considered, then the median number of teachers was five and the mean was 6.3. Regardless of how the average was calculated, it was higher than the two teachers the Virginia Department of Education recommends for sixth graders.

Why did students, if they experienced the variety and, for some, high degree of difficulty with teaming as the survey results showed and also indicated that they would liked to be taught by fewer teachers, still select to be taught by teams when given a choice? Once again their papers gave some insight into their thinking. Two reasons stood out above all the others when students explained why they preferred to be taught by several teachers. The first reason was their desire to be with their friends during school. While at first this may not seem to be a legitimate educational consideration, we must weigh adolescents' great need for socialization when making school policy, designing organizational models, and planning lessons. In their book *Life in the Three Sixth Grades*, Lounsbury and Johnston (1988) maintain:

> We often remind our students that they are not in class to socialize. We are wrong, of course, for they *are* there to socialize. It's their developmental right to socialize, something they must learn how to do as one of the major tasks of preadolescence. . . . Friends represent the

> vehicle through which independence asserts itself. Peer relationships, therefore, start to become, in the sixth grade, the number one priority for many youngsters. . . . It is important to understand and be sympathetic to the strong need of the 11 and 12-year-old to seek out and maintain friendships. . . . Schools that allow for plenty of opportunities for socialization are viewed as nice places to be by the students. It is wrong to assume, however, that schools provide time for socialization only in the lunchroom and on the playground. Classroom discussions and other group activities also allow for social interactions. (p 8).

With respect to the need for socialization, one student even said, "I like [a team] better because . . . you can make more friends and be more social." A large number of students expressed the desire to interact with a variety of people and explained that a team offers them the greatest opportunity to do that. As one student wrote, "[A team] is my favorite choice because, for one, in a team you get to meet more people. In a class with only one teacher, you only have one class of about 25 kids to meet." Another student said, "When your [*sic*] in a team you meet more kids and adults to help you and be potential friends."

Not only was the chance to meet new friends crucial to the students, but being placed on a team with the friends they already had was important to them as well. One student said that teams should be even larger so that "we could see even more of our friends." She continued, "It's [*sic*] benefits would be that us kids would see more of a selection of teachers and kids. I know how it feels to be away from friends, because my

best friend is in a different team then me [*sic*] and I miss her!" Being separated from friends was a particular concern of these students because they previously went to neighborhood schools. At this school all the students were merged, and it was unlikely that their closest friends would be on their team. Expressing his concern over this problem, one student even suggested that teams be determined by where students live in the city. He felt that the school shouldn't "jam people [from] all over the city into teams because they don't get along very well." While this may not be a viable solution, this problem was still serious for several students.

Nevertheless, many students recognized that on a team they had a greater opportunity to have some old friends in their classes as well as a greater selection of new people with whom they could make friends than they would have in a self-contained classroom. One student expressed that sentiment: "If I had only one teacher . . . I wouldn't be able to see all my friends unlike in a team. In a team you can see some of your friends."

The other dominant theme in students' support of their choice to be on a team was the likelihood of boredom with one teacher. Some associated this concern with the desire to move around. One representative student declared, "The bad thing about having one teacher is you have to sit in the same chair for hours. Don't you think that gets boring? I do." Another student maintained, "[Teams give a] student an opportunity to move around more instead of staying in one place and getting hyped up. The other system would get kids hyped up since they stay in one place for the whole day." Lounsbury and Johnston (1988) point out that this complaint from students is

educationally legitimate. In their study, they found that "observers noted consistently the conflict between the physical need for movement and the sedentary nature of schooling. . . . The growing bodies of 11 and 12-year-olds call for more opportunities for physical movement than schools currently provide" (p. 106).

Other students, however, explained that boredom with one teacher would come from being in the same environment, with the same people all day, and a lack of variety in teaching styles. One student wrote:

> If you just have one teacher, you would get tired of that teacher. Also, it's nice to have different teachers with different ways of doing things because I would get bored of the same format every day. . . . I think having teams is better because you don't get tired of being with the same teacher, all day, all year.

Another student pronounced, "I believe that when we have one teacher we are limited to what we can do."

In addition to these most frequently cited reasons, several students gave other evidence in support of their choice for teams. Related to the students' fear of boredom with one teacher, was a fear that, in a self-contained classroom, they could be forced to suffer through an entire school year with a teacher they did not like. Several students combined both concerns in their statements:

> I think that it is better to be taught by a team. . . . You don't have to stay in one place all day long. When you have different teachers they teach you different things. When you have one teacher you get tired of seeing the

> same old faces. . . . You might not like that only teacher you have for the whole day.

Another said, "One of the main problems [with one teacher] is that if you dislike your teacher your [*sic*] stuck with him or her for the rest of the year. You don't make new friends because you see the same kids in every class. Your teacher has the same idea's [*sic*] every day."

While this was a legitimate fear for some students, others reported taking advantage of the teaming situation in order not to resolve conflicts with adults. One student wrote, "I wouldn't want to have just one teacher . . . because I would be stuck with her or him all day long. If I were mad at her/him or had done something wrong, she or he would keep an eye one me all day." Another stated, "I like a team because . . . if I don't like [my teacher], the bell rings, and I go to the next teacher." Another echoed that idea, "You might not get a teacher ticked off but in about ten or twenty minutes you change classes."

Several other students explained that they enjoyed being on a team because it made them feel older and gave them more responsibility. One student explained, "If I had one teacher I would feel like I was a baby again. On a team you feel like you are older and more grown up." Another said, "If you just had one teacher you would not have to learn responsibility because you wouldn't have to swich [*sic*] classes." Finally, one student echoed the Virginia Department of Education's rationale behind teaming: "The good thing about teams is it prepares you for later on in life, like Highschool, and

colledge. Because it puts you with a variety of personality, rules, classrooms, and more" (*sic*).

Conclusions

The results showed that some students experienced confusion and a loss of stability because of being on a team. For these students, the observations of critics of team teaching appeared to be valid. Critics are right when they say that some students feel a loss of comfort changing from a self-contained class to a team teaching situation. However, their criticisms must be tempered by the knowledge that most students did not report that being on a team caused great problems for them.

Furthermore, few students felt that their team teachers did not have the time to give them the extra help they require, and even fewer felt that their teachers did not know them as well as previous self-contained teachers. For the most part, changing from a self-contained classroom to a team did not significantly change students' willingness to go to their teachers for help with personal problems. It seemed that the criticism that teams greatly reduce students' individuality in a classroom are not as well-founded from the students' perspective.

The criticism that does have some validity is that lower ability students experience more difficulties on teams. This was especially true in the case of changing classes and dealing with several different class routines. However, these students also benefitted from having a team of teachers look out for their interests during the day. Even though

they may have experienced more problems on a team, the evidence did not indicate that a self-contained classroom would better serve all of their needs.

In spite of the troubles all of the students experience, they overwhelmingly preferred being on teams. They gave several reasons, but the two most common ones were their preadolescent need to socialize with a variety of peers and adults and their need to move and work off excess energy, which they frequently communicated as a desire to avoid boredom. Students not only had preferences concerning teams, but they also had opinions on the size of those teams. Considering the importance of students' opinions and perceptions about school, these preferences should be taken into consideration by those who plan schools.

While this study only encompassed the opinions and perceptions of students from one school, the students represented a broad spectrum of backgrounds and could therefore be considered in some ways to be representative. I feel that the results are therefore generalizable to other schools and populations. The population of this study, especially gifted and low-ability students, was small, and as a result, the margin of error for these groups was unsatisfactorily large. Neither of these facts invalidate the results, however. Instead they only point to the need to confirm these findings with broader and larger studies. Clearly students have opinions, and they need to be considered.

Recommendations

Beyond further study, my first recommendation is in response to the difficulties expressed by low-ability students. While many precautions are taken to ensure that these

children survive in school, it is clear that having a large number of teachers still causes discomfort for them. In addition to teaching them organization and coping strategies, which most programs already do, schools may serve these students well by trying to reduce the number of different teachers they have. For instance, if teachers on a team teach two different academic subjects, low-ability students can be assigned to the same teacher for both subjects. Like other preadolescents, these children still need the opportunity to socialize with a variety of people and to move around, but they also need less variety in their day in order to cope.

Secondly, students' preferences need to be considered when planning schools. Students want to interact with a variety of both peers and adults during the school day. They specifically identified four to six teachers as their desired size for a team. Clearly, their preferences differ from the Virginia Department of Education's recommendation that sixth grade teams consist of two or three teachers. While I agree that smaller teams in sixth grade may help students adjust and better manage the difficulties that come with increasing the number of teachers, having only two teachers may not satisfy all the students' needs.

A compromise needs to be made to meet these competing needs. Perhaps teams should have three to four teachers to accommodate the students' desire for variety. However, that is the size of the teams in this study, and once physical education and enriching arts teachers are added to this number, students report that they have too many teachers. Smaller teams, however, limit the number of people with whom students can interact. If schools do decide to adopt smaller teams, then they need to provide

other opportunities for children to interact with a different group of peers than they already have in the academic classes of their team. One way may be to schedule physical education and enriching arts with other teams, so that students will see different students in those classes.

My third recommendation addresses the students' frequently expressed need to move around. Changing classes somewhat fulfills that need, but if smaller teams are adopted, students will no longer change classrooms as frequently. Smaller teams will also most likely result in longer instructional blocks, thereby exacerbating the students' dissatisfaction with confinement. In order to provide for the students' need to move around in an even more educationally productive way than changing classes, teachers should change the format of class during long blocks of instruction. Using a variety of instructional models such as cooperative groups and exploratory learning will allow students to move around while still being productive.

Finally, students need to be asked frequently how they feel about their school and what routines in the school cause them the most difficulty. It is clear that this is not done often enough. Many students in this study communicated a sense of powerlessness about the way their school is run, and this can lead to disinterest and negative attitudes among students. When urged, many students have insightful comments that can help adults who have forgotten what a school looks like from a child's eyes. Their input should be considered when planning schools in order to make schools more educationally productive and beneficial from a child's point of view.

Appendix A

More About the Teams in this Study

Since this school uses team teaching for both fifth and sixth grades, for students in the study being on a team was not a new experience. Students were placed on three teams of approximately 125 students each. There were five core teachers on each team: one social studies, one science, and three language arts teachers, two of whom also taught math. Some students had the same teacher for both math and language arts, although this was not always the case. Students also attended physical education class and two different enriching arts classes that alternated days. During one six-week grading period, students could have had as many as eight different teachers. Each class period lasted for 45 minutes except for language arts which was 90 minutes. Students also had approximately 10 minutes for homeroom and 20 minutes each for recess and lunch.

Teachers were given 90 minutes to plan each day. Twice a week they spent 45 minutes in a team meeting. One day was usually spent on administrative tasks, and the other was reserved for child-centered discussions. At these times team members discussed students who were having difficulties or made recommendations to place students in enrichment or intervention programs. The school counselor, reading intervention teacher, and LD resource teacher were often invited to these meetings. This time could also be used for parent conferences. The teams did not use many interdisciplinary units or cross-curricular instruction, so the teachers used little of their planning time to integrate their instruction.

The teachers on team "A" had a variety of experience ranging from two to 23 years, with a combined total of 73 years of teaching experience. Although this was their first year working together as a team, two of the teachers had worked together for as long as seven years. One teacher on team "B" had only taught for three years, but the others' experience ranged from 16 to 32 years, with a combined total of 84 years of experience. This was also their first year working together as a team, but two had taught together for eight years and three had taught together for three years. Team "C's" teachers had taught from 10 to 28 years, with a total of 95 years of teaching experience. As with the others, this was their first year together, but two had taught together for four years and several others had been together for three years.

Appendix B

Survey

Name_____

1) How many teachers do you have each day?_____

For each question below, check the statement that is TRUE FOR YOU.

2) ___ I **like** changing classes and having different teachers during the day.
___ I **don't like** changing classes and having different teachers during the day.

3) ___ My teachers have **different** rules for how I may act in class.
___ My teachers have **similar** rules for how I may act in class.

4) ___ My teachers have **different** rules for turning in homework.
___ My teachers have **similar** rules for turning in homework.

5) ___ My teachers have **different** ways they want me to keep a notebook.
___ My teachers have **similar** ways they want me to keep a notebook.

6) ___ Some of my teachers' tests are **harder** than others.
___ My teachers' tests are about the **same** level of difficulty.

7) ___ Some of my teachers give **more** homework than others.
___ My teachers give about the **same** amount of homework.

8) ___ I have **trouble** remembering my locker combination.
___ It's **easy** for me to remember my locker combination.

9) ___ I **don't** get along with my locker partner.
___ I **do** get along with my locker partner.

10) ___ I **don't like** having a locker. I wish I could just keep my books in one room all day.
___ I **like** having a locker.

11) ___ I sometimes bring the **wrong** books to class.
___ I always bring the **right** books to class.

12) ___ I am often **late** to class.
___ I am usually **on time** to class.

13) ___ Getting homework assignments from more than one teacher **is** a problem for me.
___ Getting homework assignments from more than one teacher **is not** a problem for me.

14) ___ If I need extra help on school work, the teachers on my team **don't** have the time to give it to me.
___ If I need extra help on school work, the teachers on my team **have** the time to give it to me.

15) ___ I get **less** help from my teachers now than I did when I had only one teacher.
___ I get **the same amount** of help from my teachers now than I did when I had only one teacher.
___ I get **more** help from my teachers now than I did when I had only one teacher.

16) ___ The teachers on my team **don't** know me as well as when I had just one teacher.
___ The teachers on my team know me **as well as** when I had just one teacher.
___ The teachers on my team know me **better** than when I had just one teacher.

17) ___ If I have a personal problem, I feel **comfortable** going to a teacher on my team for help.
___ If I have a personal problem, I **do not** feel comfortable going to a teacher on my team for help.

18) ___ When I had only one teacher, I felt **comfortable** going to her or him for help with a personal problem.
___ When I had only one teacher, I **did not** feel comfortable going to her or him for help with a personal problem.

19) Fill in the chart below:

GOOD THINGS ABOUT BEING ON A TEAM	PROBLEMS WITH BEING ON A TEAM
GOOD THINGS ABOUT HAVING ONE TEACHER	**PROBLEMS WITH HAVING ONE TEACHER**

Assignment:
Here's your chance to tell how you think a school should be set up, either:

- being taught by a **team** of teachers

OR

- being taught by **one** teacher for all subjects.

Please:

1) Tell how many teachers you would like to be taught by: one teacher for all subjects or a team (more than one).

2) Tell why you think the way you have chosen is good. Try and list at least 3 reasons. You may give more than 3 reasons.

3) Tell why you think it's better than the other system. For this you might want to say what some of the problems are with the system you didn't choose.

You may use the list you made above to help you.

Appendix C

Results in Raw Numbers

Number of responses from students

Total	High	Low	Quest	LD/I	
81	51	30	21	7	
67	45	22	19	4	like changing classes and having different teachers
14	6	8	2	3	don't like
					TEACHER RULES
17	9	8	2	4	different rules for how I may act in class
63	42	21	19	3	similar rules
1	0	1	0	0	NO RESPONSE
					CLASS ROUTINES/PROCEDURES
56	35	21	12	7	different rules for turning in homework
24	15	9	9	0	similar rules
1	1	0	0	0	NO RESPONSE
58	38	20	17	3	different ways to keep a notebook
22	13	9	4	3	similar ways
1	0	1	0	1	NO RESPONSE
68	45	23	19	5	some teachers' tests are harder than others'
13	6	7	2	2	about the same level of difficulty
74	50	24	21	6	some teachers give more homework than others
7	1	6	0	1	same amount of homework
33	16	17	4	3	homework assignments from several teachers is a problem
47	34	13	17	4	is not a problem
1	1	0	0	0	NO RESPONSE
					CHANGING CLASSES--LOCKERS, HALLS, ETC.
1	0	1	0	1	trouble remembering locker combination
80	51	29	21	6	easy
8	6	2	1	0	don't get along with locker partner
56	31	25	17	7	do get along
17	14	3	3	0	no locker partner
8	4	4	2	2	don't like having a locker--want to keep books in one room
73	47	26	19	5	like having a locker

Total	High	Low	Quest	LD/I	
45	30	15	13	3	sometimes bring the wrong books to class
36	21	15	8	4	always bring the right books
7	3	4	0	2	often late to class
74	48	26	21	5	usually on time
					TEACHER AVAILABILITY TO GIVE EXTRA HELP
11	5	6	1	3	if need extra help on work, team teachers don't have the time
69	45	24	20	4	have the time
1	1	0	0	0	NO RESPONSE
24	15	9	6	3	get less help from teachers now than when I had one teacher
35	24	11	13	1	the same amount of help
22	12	10	2	3	more help
7/11	1/1	2/6	1/1	1/3	teachers don't have time & get less help than before
2/11	0	2/6	0	1/3	teachers don't have time but get same amount as before
2/11	0	2/6	0	1/3	teachers don't have time but get more help than before
					TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH TEACHERS
23	18	5	8	1	team teachers don't know me as well as one teacher
46	25	21	11	3	know me as well
11	7	4	1	3	know me better
1	1	0	1	0	NO RESPONSE
38	19	19	7	5	comfortable going to a team teacher with a personal problem
37	26	11	9	2	do not feel comfortable
6	6	0	5	0	NO RESPONSE
43	25	18	9	4	comfortable going to self-contained teacher with personal problem
34	22	12	9	3	did not feel comfortable
4	4	0	3	0	NO RESPONSE
26	17	9	6	2	not comfortable with either
8	3	2	2	1	will only go to team teacher
17	9	9	3	0	will only go to a self-contained teacher

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